DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 096 535 CE 002 169

TITLE The Changing World of Work.
INSTITUTION Columbia Univ., New York, N.Y. Graduate School of Business.
PUB DATE 1 Nov 73
NOTE 16p.; Report of the American Assembly (43rd, Harriman, New York, November 1973)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Changing Attitudes; *Conference Reports; Discriminatory Attitudes (Social); Employment Potential; Employment Practices; *Employment Problems; *Employment Trends; *Government Role; Job Market; Labor Legislation; Manpower Needs; Vocational Development

ABSTRACT

The statement represents a review of the general views of the 80 participants from 16 States and the District of Columbia as prepared at the close of their discussions of the changing world of work in the United States. Major questions addressed by the group dealt with the three distinct forces involved in the cross currents of rapid change: the institutions and the jobs they provide, the society at large, and the individual worker. Needed changes can be effected through the efforts of employers, unions, and the Federal government. Presupposing the development and maintenance of a high level of employment, recommendations are presented regarding: (1) flexibility in employment practices, (2) part-time employment, (3) vocational preparation, (4) racial discrimination, (5) women, (6) middle-aged and older workers, and (7) pension plan reform. A list of assembly participants concludes the report. (MW)

ED 096537
CE 002169

Report of the
Forty-third American Assembly
November 1-4, 1973
Arden House Harriman, New York

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THE CHANGING WORLD OF WORK

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The American Assembly
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The volume *The Worker and the Job: Coping with Change* (ed. Rosow), containing the chapters described on the next page, will appear in public print in winter 1974, and may be ordered from the publisher, Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N. J. 07632.

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PREFACE

The American world of work. Despite civil rights legislation and equal employment actions, minorities continue to experience handicaps in both employment and advancement. Young workers are influenced by rising levels of education and higher expectations. Women's lib is pressing for equal employment. Growing demands for early retirement reveal disenchantment. Turnovers, absenteeism, grievances, union unrest and strikes all reflect varying degrees of job dissatisfaction.

How can these problems be reduced by the introduction of change in the nature of work and working relationships? What should be done to improve the quality of working life to optimize individual efforts and increase productivity? And in all of this what is the role of business, labor and government?

These major questions, among others, were addressed by the Forty-third American Assembly — *The Changing World of Work* — at Arden House, Harriman, New York, November 1-4, 1973.

The Assembly consisted of 80 persons from 16 states and the District of Columbia who represented varying pursuits and viewpoints. After discussion in depth for three days the participants reviewed in plenary session the report which follows.

Background for the discussions consisted of chapters prepared under the editorship of Jerome M. Rosow of Exxon Corporation as follows:

Daniel Yankelovich	*The Meaning of Work*
Eli Ginzberg	*The Changing American Economy and Labor Force*
George Strauss	*Workers: Attitudes and Adjustments*
Agis Salpukas	*Unions: A New Role?*
Peter Henle	*Economic Effects: Reviewing the Evidence*
Richard E. Walton	*Innovative Restructuring of Work*
Sam Zagoria	*Policy Implications and Future Agenda*

By its nature and articles of incorporation, The American Assembly, a private educational forum in public affairs, takes no stand on the matters it presents for discussion; and no one should establish a link between the recommendations herein and an official position of The American Assembly. It must also be said that The Ford Foundation, whose generous underwriting made this program possible, is not to be associated with any of the views on these pages.

CLIFFORD C. NELSON
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FINAL REPORT

of the

FORTY-THIRD AMERICAN ASSEMBLY

At the close of their discussions the participants in the Forty-third American Assembly, on *The Changing World of Work*, at Arden House, Harriman, New York, November 1-4, 1973, reviewed as a group the following statement. The statement represents general agreement; however no one was asked to sign it. Furthermore it should not be assumed that every participant subscribes to every recommendation.

The world of work is caught up in the cross currents of rapid change. Problems of the work place including job satisfaction demand immediate attention and action.

Three distinct forces are involved: the institutions and the jobs they provide, the society at large, and the individual worker. Each is changing at different rates of speed and with different degrees of responsiveness. The individual worker and the society are changing much faster than the institutions and the quality of the jobs they provide.

Disaffection and discontent are a reflection of increasing education and rising aspirations rather than of alienation. Worker disaffection also mirrors the problems of society generally. It is a symptom of a dynamic society that is questioning itself in order to achieve a better society.

The society must take a larger view of work and examine how it relates to increased or decreased satisfaction with life, both on and off the job. The issue is made clear by focusing on the expectations workers bring to the job and on the distinction between economic and psychological work satisfaction. While the employer is primarily motivated to create and maintain a productive work place, this is not incompatible with a high quality of working life, provided there is a balanced relationship among human, technical, and economic factors.

Worker reactions also reflect a conflict between changing employee attitudes and organization inertia. Employees want challenge and personal growth, but work tends to be simplified and over-specialized. Employees want to be involved in patterns of mutual influence, but organizations are characterized by decision-making concentrated at the top. Employees want careers and self-development, but organizations design rigid career paths that sometimes impede fulfillment of these goals. Employees want more opportunity to achieve self-esteem, but many organizations emphasize impersonality.

Some have argued that the press and the professors have created a straw man on the issue of worker discontent. The Assembly does not agree. The problem exists at many levels in both private and public employment. It affects white-collar, blue-collar, professional, and service employees.

Our lives are organized around our jobs. The work ethic is deeply imbedded in our cultural values. For Americans, it means a commitment to

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productive labor, involving security, independence, self-esteem, and dignity.

Yet the work ethic is often thwarted. The inefficiencies and impersonality at many work places, decision-making which excludes participation by individual workers, and insufficient recognition or reward to workers for high-quality output—all contribute to increasing consumer complaints about the quality of goods and services. Increasingly, workers question both employer decisions and the concept of work for work's sake alone. But the desire to accomplish something and to do so effectively remains.

New cultural trends are transforming the work ethic. These include: the changing definition of success, reduced fears of economic security, a new sharing of labor between the sexes, and a spreading disillusionment with a narrow definition of efficiency.

As the economic needs of workers are met, there will be increasing demands for improvement in the quality of working life. These demands will not substitute for the need for basic economic reward and security. Neither can we ignore the fact that millions of workers are still struggling to achieve a modicum of economic security and an opportunity to earn an adequate income. They are often obliged to sacrifice considerations of improvements in the quality of working life in their struggle to survive.

Big organizations often provide greater financial reward for workers than small organizations but are sometimes a breeding place for worker discontent. The individual can be diminished in these giant organizations, where special attention needs to be given to the quality of working life.

Unions have contributed significantly to the improvement in wages, hours, working conditions, the quality of work life, and the advancement of the interests of all workers. Union leaders, for their part, are concerned about the talk of "job enrichment." Many suspect it is a code word for speedup or a device to undermine unionism. The challenge now is for labor and management to work at resolving the issues of the work place in a nonadversary atmosphere, with a goal of improving the quality of working life.

Finally, it is recognized that needed changes must be sought within the context of rising international economic competition and other economic pressures.

Redesign of Work

Employers should place the same emphasis toward the design of human work that they have long placed upon the design of the physical plant. In the long-range interests of the enterprise, they should be as innovative and concerned about the needs and feelings of the workers as they are with their profits. A broad spectrum of experiments should include: basic changes in the production process; improving health and safety conditions; more attractive surroundings; reduction of special privileges and greater equity in amenities; consideration of more flexible work schedules; use of work teams; and more decentralized decision-making. New designs in the work place can more nearly satisfy the needs of workers while they enhance overall vitality of the organization.

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Many workers want and should have more of a voice in the world of work. Work is so critical and vital to their lives that to continue to exclude them from participation in decision-making is to remain out of step with the rest of society. At the same time, it is recognized that not every worker wants to be consulted regarding his or her job. While authority is an integral factor in the operation of our society, the bases of authority should be competence and contribution, not just arbitrary rank.

The work place cannot remain authoritarian within an open society. Increasing organizational democracy will contribute to an increasingly free society.

Employers

Management has the capacity for initiating changes in the work place and some have successfully done so. The record of successful experiments, while small, is encouraging. This Assembly believes that significant social and economic gains can be made if more experiments are introduced to improve the quality of the working life. A restructuring of work and work organizations holds promise of more effective development of employees while adding to their work satisfaction without adverse effect on the companies' costs and with potential gains in productivity.

To advance such experiments top management must recognize and seek to allay the insecurities of their middle managers, foremen, and workers. Middle managers and employees often resist any reduction of their power and authority since this may be viewed as a threat not only to their authority but to their jobs.

Too often managers underestimate the capabilities of their employees. If authority were reasonably decentralized or released, management could gain substantially. Therefore improvements in the quality of working life and increased participation in development of human talent will benefit the organization just as it serves individual aspirations.

Unions

Unions have since their inception been seeking to "humanize" work. The current ideas of improving the quality of working life are basically an extension of this long-range goal. Unions have primarily sought and have achieved significant economic gains and substantially increased job security. This should not obscure their long-term struggle for improvement in the quality of working life. Unions properly resent the view that they are not concerned over this issue.

Unions rightly fear that some management people will attempt to use "job enrichment" as a guise for speedup. Yet this fear should not be a bar to the possibilities of genuine improvement in jobs. Improved quality in work life may increase productivity, and often will, but this should not be the only factor considered. Unions will probably be reluctant to participate in experiments to change work unless there are rewards to the worker. This is legitimate.

Unions should continue to move ahead, cooperating and in some cases spurring management to induce change. Unions should participate in ex-

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periments and play a larger role. There are new and encouraging precedent-setting breakthroughs in recent union-management initiatives in the case of the steel and auto workers. Relations between management and labor unions have improved perceptibly over the past two decades. Thus new opportunities exist in their mutual interest to improve the quality of working life.

Government

The issue of human dignity at work is an important national goal. It must be high on the national agenda. Government at all levels has long recognized a commitment to enhance the work place environment. But to these commitments it should establish a new national policy that improvement in the quality of working life for all workers is desirable to raise standards of living, protect mental and physical health and welfare, and advance individual fulfillment.

Government should conduct surveys aimed at establishing and tracking levels of job dissatisfaction and factors associated with job dissatisfaction. It should identify the extent of the problem for a wide variety of organizations, and provide information for different segments of the working population. Government should encourage research and development in work design, fund experiments, convene national conferences, support worker exchange programs, distribute literature, stimulate and perhaps subsidize these efforts.

It should not be overlooked that governments at all levels employ 18 percent of the nation's labor force. Many of the recommendations for improving quality of work life in other sections of this report apply to federal, state, and local governments.

Advantage should be taken of the well-documented military manpower program (which exceeds $40 billion annually), and use should be made of these continuing studies to establish models on social issues pertaining to youth, minorities, and women.

Innovation and Dissemination

Improvements in the quality of working life will benefit from the discovery and application of effective methods of redesigning jobs and other changes. The present level of information and know-how is inadequate. We need new institutional arrangements to accelerate change. We need talent and organizations on the shop floor and in the office to deal with and advance the quality of working life. These concepts can be applied to both union and nonunion situations.

Agencies for Change: There is a need to establish nonprofit institutes to further the improvement of the quality of working life. These should be funded jointly from private and public sources. Funds should be contributed by government, foundations, management, and unions so that all are involved and all have a stake in the outcome. These institutes would stimulate and assist management and labor in developing experiments and programs and in the measurement of the full range of their effects. They should serve not only as a stimulus for experimentation but should reflect

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changes around the world. They should develop professional talent equipped to facilitate change.

In addition, universities and other established educational institutions should continue to conduct research into and evaluation of experiments on improving the quality of working life and to distribute their findings. Moreover, schools of business, engineering, law, labor relations, and other disciplines training people directly involved in designing and managing work must include in their curricula greater consideration of factors affecting the quality of working life.

Work issues should also become the concern of civic, religious, educational, neighborhood, and other organizations to increase the linkage between the work place and the community and to achieve new approaches to workers' needs in the broadest possible framework.

Adapting to Change

While the nature of work is central to discussion of the quality of work life, other aspects of work frequently cause strong and specific worker discontent. Improving only job tasks may not be sufficient to improve worker satisfaction unless these other factors also are improved.

(The following recommendations presuppose the development and maintenance of a high level of employment, without which they cannot be fully implemented.)

Flexibility and Mobility: Rigid rules and restrictive customs regarding work should be reexamined. Acceptable programs are needed to enhance mobility, develop the use of human resources, fulfill human potential, and advance economic welfare. Many employees want job mobility and more options in their fringe benefits, pensions, and other deferred payments.

The barriers to job change presented by economics, geography, invalid credential requirements, and other factors should be reduced or eliminated.

Part-time Employment: More and better part-time jobs would greatly increase the opportunities and choices for all workers, particularly women, youth, handicapped, and older workers who seek such opportunities. Such jobs are more easily harmonized with new life styles combining work, education, home, and family. Current wage and benefit practices which discriminate against part-time workers must be changed so as to increase opportunity and ease labor shortages in particular occupations or industries.

Transitions Involving the Home, the School, and the Work Place: Many young people are poorly prepared for the world of work. Schools, in cooperation with government, business, unions and parents, should improve methods for career development. Career education and cooperative education programs should become an integral part of the school system. Provisions must be made for the financial commitment and job redesign which such programs require. Moreover, all people must have access to education throughout their lives with minimal financial and occupational disruption. Continuing education upgrades existing careers, advances second careers, and generally enriches lives.

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Discrimination: Despite progress, ethnic and racial minorities, women, youth, and older workers still suffer severe discrimination in public and private employment. Our progress is significant only in contrast to where we were a decade ago. We must develop a more effective national effort to achieve opportunity for full participation in the work force at all levels of employment. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) must be sustained and strengthened. The handicapped also need more opportunity to enter the world of work and establish their full place in society.

This effort would help give these groups access to employment and begin to meet their most basic aspirations for decent jobs, income security, and a sense of self-worth. The continuing discrimination against ethnic and racial minorities resists change and must be eliminated. A full employment economy will accelerate the achievement of these objectives.

Women: Women represent the single largest sector of the population that has been blocked from access to meaningful jobs and careers. To improve the opportunities of those who seek work out of the home requires that they have access to financial aid for educational opportunities, preferably prior to or at the time they are ready to enter or reenter the work force.

It also requires employers and trade unions to remove all barriers to equal employment, compensation, training, and promotion. Women must receive equal pay for equal work. Greater flexibility in hours should be provided by employers so that both husbands and wives can arrange their schedules with greater ease. A substantial expansion in educational day care and after school care centers will further improve opportunities for meaningful working careers for women and should be undertaken by employers, unions, and government. And where applicable, fee schedules should be geared to family income.

Middle-Aged and Older Workers: Options for older workers are often severely limited. Not only is their age an artificial handicap to other employment but deferred benefits are tied to their jobs and lost if they leave. Moreover, there are few opportunities for them to find additional education or training. The labor market itself is a frightening place.

Increased mobility and second career chances are needed. They also strengthen the institutions where work is performed since organizations often carry employees who are marginal performers, blocked, frustrated, and relatively unable to make a worthwhile contribution. Continuing education with income support would broaden the options available to workers. More funds are required from both public and private sectors.

Pension Plan Reform: It has been assumed and accepted that both employers' and employees' interests were served by establishing pension plans which put a high premium on staying with one firm. This philosophy is incompatible with the need for flexibility, mobility, and individual freedom in our society. Nor does it serve the best interests of the firm. In too many enterprises, executives, middle managers, and rank and file workers have left the firm mentally but will not leave physically until they retire.

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Pensions represent the single most important deferred benefit of American workers. Private retirement plans now cover nearly 50 percent of the private work force, more than double the proportion for 1950. However, it has been estimated that more than half of all the workers covered by these plans will draw few, if any, benefits under present law. In addition, half of the American labor force is without *any* private pension plan coverage.

We must therefore expand pension coverage and endorse comprehensive federal pension reform legislation, especially provisions for early vesting and adequate funding.

Conclusion

Something, clearly, is stirring. In part, we are witnessing changes in personal values that are seen and felt not only in the United States but around the world. In part, we are experiencing the latest chapter in the continuing story of the quest for fulfilling American goals and aspirations: a fair and equitable society; an opportunity for each citizen to participate in the forces that affect his life; a confirmation that the democratic process does, indeed work for all. Now that challenge is emerging at the most basic level of work itself. The questions have come down to society's responsibility to provide a higher quality of working life and increasing opportunities for those millions on the fringe who for so long have endured the reality of a life in which all our fine talk about job enrichment and job humanization is meaningless. We believe that the changes we advocate can help us work toward a more democratic and more productive society. They will not solve all the problems; they are a beginning.

Our view is pragmatic: improving the place, the organization, and the nature of work can lead to better work performance and a better quality of life in the society. A crisis, though it may not presently exist, could confront us if business, labor, educational institutions, community leadership, and government fail to respond. If we are lulled by our successes of the past, if we presume they inevitably will carry over into our future, we are mistaken. They will not. While we differ on specific points and proposals, we are united in one belief — these questions are vital. The time has now come to put our words and proposals into action.

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ABOUT THE AMERICAN ASSEMBLY

The American Assembly was established by Dwight D. Eisenhower at Columbia University in 1950. It holds nonpartisan meetings and publishes authoritative books to illuminate issues of United States policy.

An affiliate of Columbia, with offices in the Graduate School of Business, the Assembly is a national, educational institution incorporated in the State of New York.

The Assembly seeks to provide information, stimulate discussion, and evoke independent conclusions in matters of vital public interest.

American Assembly Sessions

At least two national programs are initiated each year. Authorities are retained to write background papers presenting essential data and defining the main issues in each subject.

About 60 men and women representing a broad range of experience, competence, and American leadership meet for several days to discuss the Assembly topic and consider alternatives for national policy.

All Assemblies follow the same procedure. The background papers are sent to participants in advance of the Assembly. The Assembly meets in small groups for four or five lengthy periods. All groups use the same agenda. At the close of these informal sessions participants adopt in plenary session a final report of findings and recommendations.

Regional, state, and local Assemblies are held following the national session at Arden House. Assemblies have also been held in England, Switzerland, Malaysia, Canada, the Caribbean, South America, Central America, the Philippines, and Japan. Over one hundred institutions have cosponsored one or more Assemblies.

Arden House

Home of The American Assembly and scene of the national sessions is Arden House, which was given to Columbia University in 1950 by W. Averell Harriman. E. Roland Harriman joined his brother in contributing toward adaptation of the property for conference purposes. The buildings and surrounding land, known as the Harriman Campus of Columbia University, are 50 miles north of New York City.

Arden House is a distinguished conference center. It is self-supporting and operates throughout the year for use by organizations with educational objectives. The American Assembly is a tenant of this Columbia University facility only during Assembly sessions.

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